

WHY WE ARE MILITANT.

A Speech Delivered by Mrs. PANKHURST in New York City, October 21, 1913.

I know that in your minds there are questions like these; you are saying, "Woman Suffrage is sure to come; the emancipation of humanity is an evolutionary process, and how is it the women of Great Britain, instead of trusting to that evolution, instead of educating the masses of people of their country, instead of educating their own sex to prepare them for citizenship, how is it that those militant women in England are using violence and upsetting the business arrangements of their country in their undue impatience to attain their end?"

Well, ladies and gentlemen, let me try to explain to you the situation.

Although you have a great deal of democracy, a great deal of representative government there, England is the most conservative country on earth; why, your forefathers found that out a great many years ago. If you had passed your life in England as I have, you would know that there are certain words which certainly, during the last two generations, certainly until about ten years ago, aroused a feeling of horror and fear in the minds of the mass of the people. The word revolution, for instance, was identified in England with all kind of horrible ideas. The idea of change, the idea of unsettling the established order of things.

Now, in America it is the proud boast of some of the most conservative men and women that I have met that they are descended from the heroes of the revolution. You have an organisation, I believe, called the Daughters of the Revolution, whose members put an interpretation upon the word revolution which is quite different from the interpretation given to it in Great Britain. Perhaps that will help you to realise how extremely difficult it is in Great Britain to get anything done. All my life I have heard people talking in advocacy of reforms which it was self-evident would be for the good of the people, and yet it has all ended in talk; they are still talking about these reforms, and unless something happens of a volcanic nature they will go on talking about them until the end of time. Nothing ever has been got out of the British Parliament without something very nearly approaching a revolution. You need something dynamic in order to force legislation through the House of Commons; in fact, the whole machinery of government in England may almost be said to be an elaborate arrangement for not doing anything.

Now, you may say in answer to that, that there has been some social legislation in England in recent years.

The extensions of the franchise to the men of my country have been preceded by very great violence, by something like a revolution, by something like civil war. In 1832, you know we were on the edge of a civil war and on the edge of revolution, and it was at the point of the sword—no, not at the point of the sword—it was after the practice of arson on so large a scale that half the city of Bristol was burned down in a single night, it was because more and greater violence and arson were feared that the Reform Bill of 1832 was allowed to pass into law. In 1867, John Bright urged the people of London to crowd the approaches to the Houses of Parliament in order to show their determination, and he said that if they did that no Parliament, however obdurate, could resist their just demands. Rioting went on all over the country, and as the result of that rioting, as the result of that unrest, which resulted in the pulling down of the Hyde Park railings, as a result of the fear of more rioting and violence that the Reform Act of 1867 was put upon the statute books.

In 1884 came the turn of the agricultural labourer; Joseph Chamberlain, who afterwards became a very conservative person and a radical, threatened that, unless the vote was given to the agricultural labourer, he would march 100,000 men from Birmingham to know the reason why, rioting was threatened and feared, and so the agricultural labourers got the vote.

Meanwhile, during the '80's, women, like men, were asking for the franchise. Appeals, larger and more numerous than for any other reform, were presented in support of Woman Suffrage. Meetings of the great corporations, great town councils, and city councils, passed resolutions asking that women should have the vote. More

meetings were held, and larger, for Woman Suffrage than were held for votes for men, and yet the women did not get it. Men got the vote because they were and would be violent. The women did not get it because they were constitutional and law-abiding. Why, isn't it evident to everyone that people who are patient where government is concerned may go on being patient. Why should anyone trouble to help them? I take to myself some shame that through all those years, at any rate from the early '80's, when I first came into the Suffrage movement, I did not learn my political lessons.

I believed, as many women still in England believe, that women could get their way in some mysterious manner, by purely woman's methods. We have been so accustomed, we women, to accept one standard for men and another standard for women, that we have even applied that variation of standard to the injury of our political welfare.

In the twentieth century women, having had better opportunities of education, and having had some training in politics, having in political life come so near to the superior being as to see that he was not altogether such a fount of wisdom as we had supposed, that he had his human weaknesses as we had, the twentieth century women began to say to themselves, "Is it not time, since our methods have failed and the men's have succeeded, that we should take a leaf out of their political book?"

We were led to that conclusion, we older women, by the advice of the young—you know there is a French proverb which says, "If youth knew; if age could," but I think that we ought to reverse it, and when you can bring together youth and age, as we have done, and get them to adopt the same methods and take the same point of view, then you are on the high road to success.

Well, we in Great Britain, on the eve of the General Election of 1905, a mere handful of us—why, you could almost count us on the fingers of both hands—set out on the wonderful adventure of forcing the greatest Government of modern times to give the women the vote. Only a few in number; we were not strong in influence, and we had hardly any money, and yet we quite gaily made our little banners with the words "Votes for Women" upon them, and we set out to win the enfranchisement of the women of our country.

The Suffrage movement was almost dead. The women had lost heart. You could not get a Suffrage meeting that was attended by members of the general public. We used to have about 24 adherents in the front row. We carried our resolutions and heard no more about them.

Two women changed that in a twinkling of an eye at a great Liberal demonstration in Manchester, where a Liberal leader, Sir Edward Grey, was explaining the programme to be carried out during the Liberals' next turn of office. The two women put the fateful question, "When are you going to give votes to women?" and refused to sit down until they had been answered. These two women were sent to gaol, and from that day to this the women's movement, both militant and constitutional, has never looked back. We had little more than one moribund society for Woman Suffrage in those days. Now we have about 40 societies for Woman Suffrage, composed both of men and women, and they are large in membership, they are rich in money, and their ranks are swelling every day that passes. That is how militancy has put back the clock of Woman Suffrage in Great Britain.

Now, some of you have said how wicked it is (the commissioners told me that on Saturday afternoon), how wicked it is to attack the property of private individuals who have done us no harm. Well, you know there is a proverb which says that you cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs. I wish we could.

I want to say here and now that the only justification for violence, the only justification for risk to the comfort of other human beings is the fact that you have tried all other available means and have failed to secure justice, and as a law-abiding person—and I am by nature a law-abiding person, as one hating violence, hating disorder—I want to say that from the moment we began

our militant agitation to this day I have felt absolutely guiltless in this matter.

I tell you that in Great Britain there is no other way. We can show intolerable grievances. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Lloyd George, who is no friend of the woman's movement, although a professed one, said a very true thing when speaking of the grievances of his own country, of Wales. He said, "There comes a time in the life of human beings suffering from intolerable grievances when the only way to maintain their self respect is to revolt against that injustice."

Well, I say the time is long past when it became necessary for women to revolt in order to maintain their self respect in Great Britain. The women who are waging this war are women who would fight, if it were only for the idea of liberty—if it were only that they might be free citizens of a free country—I myself would fight for that idea alone. But we have, in addition to this love of freedom, intolerable grievances to redress.

We do not feel the weight of those grievances in our persons. I think it is very true that people who are crushed by personal wrong are not the right people to fight for reforms. The people who can fight best are the people who have happy lives themselves, the fortunate ones. At any rate, in our revolution it is the happy women, the fortunate women, the women who have drawn prizes in the lucky bag of life, in the shape of good fathers, good husbands and good brothers, they are the women who are fighting this battle. They are fighting it for the sake of others more helpless than themselves, and it is of the grievances of those helpless ones that I want to say a few words to-night to make you understand the meaning of our militant campaign.

Those grievances are so pressing that, so far from it being a duty to be patient and to wait for evolution, in thinking of those grievances the idea of patience is intolerable, and we feel that patience is something akin to crime when our patience involves continued suffering on the part of the oppressed.

We are fighting to get the power to alter bad laws; but some people say to us, "Go to the representatives in the House of Commons, point out to them that these laws are bad, and you will find them quite ready to alter them."

Ladies and gentlemen, there are women in my country who have spent long and useful lives trying to get reforms, and because of their voteless condition they are unable even to get the attention, to get the ear of Members of Parliament, much less are they able to secure those reforms.

Our marriage and divorce laws are a disgrace to civilisation. I sometimes wonder, looking back from the serenity of past middle age, at the courage of women. I wonder that women have the courage to take upon themselves the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood when I see how little protection the law of my country affords them. I wonder that a woman will face the ordeal of childbirth with the knowledge that after she has risked her life to bring a child into the world she has absolutely no parental rights over the future of that child. Think what trust women have in men when a woman will marry a man, knowing, if she has knowledge of the law, that if that man is not all she in her love for him thinks him; that he may even bring a strange woman into the house, bring his mistress into the house to live with her, and she cannot get legal relief from such a marriage as that.

How often is women's trust misplaced, and yet how whole-hearted and how touching that trust must be when a woman, in order to get love and companionship will run such terrible risks in entering into marriage. Yet women have done it, and as we get to know more of life we militant Suffragists have nerved ourselves and forced ourselves to learn something of how other people live. As we get that knowledge we realise how political power, how political influence, which would enable us to get better laws, would make it possible for thousands upon thousands of unhappy women to-day to have lived happier lives.

(The remainder of Mrs. Pankhurst's speech will appear in our next issue.)

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(The first part of this speech appeared in our last issue.)

Well, you may say the laws may be inadequate, the laws may be bad, but human nature, after all, is not much influenced by laws, and upon the whole people live fairly happy lives. Well, for those who are fortunate it is very comfortable to have that idea, but if you will really look at life as we find it in our centralised civilisation in Europe, you will find that after all the law is a great educator, and if men are brought up to think the law allows them to behave badly to those who should be nearest and dearest to them, the worst kind of man is very apt to take full advantage of all the laxity of the law.

What have we been hearing of so much during the last few years? It is a very remarkable thing, ladies and gentlemen, that along with this woman's movement, along with this woman's revolt, you are having a great uncovering of social sores. We are having light let into dark places, whether it is in the United States or whether it is in the old countries of Europe, you find the social ills from which humanity suffers are very much the same. Every civilised country has been discussing how to deal with that most awful slavery, the white slave traffic.

When I was a very tiny child the great American people were divided into hostile sections on the question of whether it was right that one set of human beings of one colour should buy and sell human beings of another colour, and you have had a bloody war to settle that question. I tell you that throughout the civilised world to-day there is a slavery more awful than negro slavery in its worst form ever was. It is called the white slave traffic, but in that awful traffic there are slaves of every shade of colour, and they are all of one sex.

Well, in my country we have been having legislation to deal with it. We have had a White Slave Act, and under that Act of Parliament, in that Act of Parliament, they have put clauses that are called flogging clauses. Certain men are to be flogged if they are convicted and found guilty under that Act of Parliament, and the British House of Commons, composed of men of all shades of mottled colour, waxed highly eloquent on the need of flogging these so-called tigers of the human race, men engaged in the white slave traffic.

Well, we women looked on and we read their speeches, but in our hearts we said, "Why don't they decide to go to the people for whom the white slave traffic exists? What is the use of dealing with the emissaries, with the slave hunters, with the purveyors? Why don't they go to the very seat of the evil; why don't they attack the customers? If there was no demand there would be no traffic, because business does not exist if there is no demand for it?" And so we women said, "It's no use, gentlemen, trying to put us off with sentimental legislation on the white slave traffic. We don't trust you to settle it; we want to have a hand in settling it ourselves, because we think we know how." And we have a right to distrust that legislation. They passed the Act very, very quickly; they put it on the statute books, and we have seen it in operation, and we know that the time of Parliament and the time of the nation was wasted on a piece of legislation which I fear was never intended to be taken very seriously; something to keep the women quiet, something to lull us into a sense of security, something to make us believe that now, at least, the Government were really grappling with the situation.

Well, and so we attacked this great evil. We said, "How can we expect real legislation to deal with the white slave traffic on a small scale when the Government of the country is the biggest white slave trading firm that we have got?"

And it is true, because you know, although we have suppressed such regulation of vice in England, we have got it in full swing in the great dependencies that we own all over the world, and we have only to turn to India and look to every place where our Army is stationed to find the Government, which is in no way responsible to women, dealing, taking part in that awful trade, in absolute cold bloodedness where native women are concerned, all, forsooth, in the name of the health of the men of our forces.

Well, we have been speaking out, ladies and gentlemen; we have been saying to our nation and the rulers of our nation, "We will not have the health of one-half of the community, their pretended health, maintained at the expense of the degradation and sorrow and misery of the other half."

I want to ask you whether, in all the revolutions of the past, in your own revolt against British rule, you had deeper or greater reasons for revolt than women have to-day?

Take the industrial side of the question: have men's wages for a hard day's work ever been so low and inadequate as are women's wages to-day? Have men ever had to suffer from the laws more injustice than women suffer? Is there a single reason which men have had for liberty that does not also apply to women?

Why, if you were talking to the men of any other nation you would not hesitate to reply in the affirmative. There is not a man in this meeting who has not felt sympathy with the uprising of the men of other lands when suffering from intolerable tyranny, when deprived of all representative rights. You are full of sympathy with men in Russia. You are full of sympathy with nations that rise against the domination of the Turk. You are full of sympathy with all struggling people striving for independence. How is it, then, that you have nothing but ridicule and contempt and reprobation for women who are fighting for exactly the same thing?

All my life I have tried to understand why it was that men who valued their citizenship as their dearest possession seemed to think citizenship ridiculous when it was to be applied to the women of their race. And I found an explanation, and it is the only one I can think of. It came to me when I was in a prison cell, remembering how I had seen men laugh at the idea of women going to prison. Why they would confess they could not bear a cell door to be shut upon themselves for a single hour without asking to be let out. A thought came to me in my prison cell, and it was this: that to men women are not human beings like themselves. Some men think we are superhuman; they put us on pedestals; they revere us; they think we are too fine and too delicate to come down into the hurly-burly of life. Other men think us sub-human; they think we are a strange species unfortunately having to exist for the perpetuation of the race. They think that we are fit for drudgery, but that in some strange way our minds are not like theirs, our love for great things is not like theirs, and so we are a sort of sub-human species.

We are neither superhuman nor are we sub-human. We are just human beings like yourselves.

Our hearts burn within us when we read the great mottoes which celebrate the liberty of your country; when we go to France and we read the words, liberty, fraternity and equality, don't you think that we appreciate the meaning of those words? And then when we wake to the knowledge that these things are not for us, they are only for our brothers, then there comes a sense of bitterness into the hearts of some women, and they say to themselves, "Will men never understand?" But so far as we in England are concerned, we have come to the conclusion that we are not going to leave men any illusions upon the question.

When we were patient, when we believed in argument and persuasion, they said, "You don't really want it because, if you did, you would do something unmistakable to show you were determined to have it." And then when we did something unmistakable they said, "You are behaving so badly you show you are not fit for it."

Now, gentlemen, in your heart of hearts you do not believe that. You know perfectly well that there never was a thing worth having that was not worth fighting for. You know perfectly well that if the situation were reversed, if you had no constitutional rights and we had all of them, if you had the duty of paying and obeying and trying to look as pleasant as possible, and we were the proud citizens who could decide our fate and yours, because we knew what was good for you better than you knew for yourselves, you know perfectly well that you wouldn't stand it for a single day, and you would be perfectly justified in rebelling against such intolerable conditions.

Well, in Great Britain we have tried persuasion, we have tried the plan of showing (by going upon public bodies, where they allowed us to do work they hadn't much time to do themselves) that we were rather capable people. We did it in the hope that we should convince them and persuade them to do the right and proper thing. But we had all our labour for our pains, and now we are fighting for our rights, and we are growing

stronger and better women in the process. We are getting more fit to use our rights because we have such difficulty in getting them.

And now may I say a word in answer to the people who criticise my coming to America?

Always when human beings have been struggling for freedom they have looked to happier parts of the world for support and sympathy. In your hour of trouble you went to other peoples and asked them for help. It seems to me, looking into the past, into my recollections of history, that a great man named Benjamin Franklin went to France to ask the French people to help in the struggle for American independence. You didn't apologise for sending him, and I am sure he didn't apologise for going. There may have been people in France who said, "Why does this pestilent, rebellious fellow come over trying to stir up people here in our peaceful country?" But, in the main, the people of France welcomed him. Their hearts thrilled at the idea of a brave and courageous struggle, and they sent money and they sent men to help to fight and win the independence of the American Republic.

Those who have been struggling for freedom in other lands have come to you, and I can't help remembering that right through the struggle of the Irish people they sent law breakers to plead with you for help for law breakers in Ireland.

Yes, and like all political law breaking done by men the form their violence has taken has not been merely to break some shop windows or to set on fire the house of some rich plutocrat, but it has found its expression in the taking of human life, in the injury even of poor, dumb animals who could have no part in the matter. And yet you looked at that agitation in a large way. You said, "In times of revolution and revolt you cannot curb the human spirit, you cannot bind men and women down to narrow rules of conduct which are proper and right in times of peace," and you sent your money and you sent help to cheer the Irish people in their struggle for greater freedom.

Why, then, should not I come to ask for help for British women? Whatever helps them is going to help women all over the world. It will be the hastening of your victory. It has not been necessary in the United States for women to be militant in the sense that we are, and perhaps one of the reasons why it is not necessary and why it may never be necessary is that we are doing the militant work for you. And we are glad to do that work. We are proud to do that work. If there are any men who are fighters in this hall, any men who have taken part in warfare, I tell you, gentlemen, that amongst the other good things that you, consciously or unconsciously, have kept from women, you have kept the joy of battle.

We know the joy of battle. When, we have come out of the gates of Holloway at the point of death, battered, starved, forcibly fed as some of our women have been—their mouths forced open by iron gags—their bodies bruised, they have felt when the prison bars were broken and the doors have opened, even at the point of death, they have felt the joy of battle and the exultation of victory.

People have said that women could never vote, never share in the government, because government rests upon force. We have proved that is not true. Government rests not upon force; government rests upon the consent of the governed; and the weakest woman, the very poorest woman, if she withholds her consent cannot be governed.

They sent me to prison, to penal servitude for three years. I came out of prison at the end of nine days. I broke my prison bars. Four times they took me back again; four times I burst the prison door open again. And I left England openly to come and visit America, with only three or four weeks of the three years' sentence of penal servitude served. Have we not proved, then, that they cannot govern human beings who withhold their consent?

And so we are glad that we have had the fighting experience, we are glad to do all the fighting for all the women all over the world; and all that we ask of you is to back us up. We ask you to show that although, perhaps, you do not mean to fight as we do, that you understand the meaning of our fight; that you realise that we are women fighting for a great idea; that we wish the betterment of the human race, and that we believe that betterment is coming through the emancipation and uplifting of women.